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SUBJECT: SPEAKER PREDICTS PASSAGE OF ELECTION LAW OCTOBER
17-18

REF: BAGHDAD 2756

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Iraqi Speaker of the Council of Representatives (COR) Ayad Samarra'i told the Ambassador October 14 that he expects a vote (and passage) of the election law October 17 or 18. As a way of coaxing agreement over the divisive issue of Kirkuk, the Speaker said he would float a proposal that he hoped he could use to patch over the differences. It would call for establishing a committee -- with participation from the Ministry of Interior and from the COR -- to review voter registration records for Kirkuk and to "cancel" the registration of people who had illegally registered. Samarra'i indicated that the proposal would serve its purpose in short-circuiting the debate on the election law even if actual implementation afterwards was problematic. He told the Ambassador that it was possible that one or two electoral commissioners would be removed but if so, it would be done in a way that would not disrupt the Commission's critical work. He acknowledged the Ambassador's point that Iran was not being a good neighbor, but noted "they have been our neighbor for 5,000 years and we have to find a way to live with them." The Speaker gently criticized some neighboring Arab states for lacking self-confidence and exaggerating the influence and power of Iran. End Summary.

PASSAGE PREDICTED OCTOBER 17... OR 18

¶2. (C) Iraqi Speaker of the Council of Representatives (COR) Ayad Samarra'i told the Ambassador October 14 that he expects a vote (and passage) of the election law on October 17 or 18. He is hopeful that October 13 COR discussions concluded the debate phase, so that an October 17 vote would satisfy the COR's four-day waiting requirement between discussion and vote. If not, he expects the vote October 18. He predicted that the new law would call for open lists, where voters select individual candidates rather than party or coalition lists.

KIRKUK CONTINUES TO DIVIDE

¶3. (C) Samarra'i acknowledged that the issue of Kirkuk continued to divide the COR with Sunni Arabs and Turkomen on one side, and Kurds on the other, insisting on maximalist proposals completely unacceptable to the other side. He expressed hope that extended, often angry discussion had helped the two sides realize that they would have to be more realistic. The Arabs and Turkomen needed to understand that assigning quotas for Kirkuk's seats in the January national elections was probably unconstitutional. He agreed with the Ambassador that the Kurds needed to be told that their hopes of unfettered use of the Kirkuk voter lists to run the electoral table in a final status referendum and for the provincial council elections were completely unrealistic.

BUT THE SPEAKER HAS A PLAN

¶4. (C) The Speaker said he would float a proposal that he hoped he could use to patch over the differences. It would call for establishing a committee -- with participation from the Ministry of Interior and from the COR -- to review voter registration records for Kirkuk and to "cancel" the registration of people who had illegally registered. Samarra'i seemed to understand that the proposal would be hard to implement in a credible way. "It will solve the problem even if it doesn't succeed," he explained. (COMMENT: UNAMI, which is familiar with the Speaker's proposal, told us, in a bit of hyperbole, that it would take Samarra'i "three years, not three months" to form a committee and Q"three years, not three months" to form a committee and review all the registry lists for Kirkuk. Samarra'i was candid in acknowledging such implementation problems but seemed confident the proposal would serve its purpose as a bridging mechanism to facilitate the COR vote. The virtue of Samarra'i's proposal is that it does not require any amendment to the election law; it is an extra-textual proposal. COR members would vote to accept an election law that makes no mention of Kirkuk one way or the other. The theory is that Arab and Turkomen COR members would be partially mollified with this promise of a committee, enough to vote for the law or at least not become so angered that passage of the election law would spark threats of walkouts or election boycotts. Samarra'i said he hoped both sides would understand that all that was at stake in the January election was a couple of extra "Kurdish" COR seats for Kirkuk which, in a parliament of 312 seats, would not translate into any significant political advantage for the Kurds. DPM

Issawi related to A/DCM October 14 the same approach to breaking the Kirkuk deadlock in the COR and pronounced it satisfactory. END COMMENT.)

IHEC PROBLEM DOWNSIZED

¶5. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's concern about a no-confidence vote in members on the Independent High Electoral Commission, Samarra'i reiterated his view that any fallout could be contained without disrupting the work of IHEC. He told the Ambassador that it was possible that one or two commissioners would be removed but if so, it would be done in a way that would not disrupt the Commission's critical work. The Speaker said he would confer with the IHEC commissioners about how to proceed with these dismissals to avoid disruption or paralysis.

KUDOS ON INVESTMENT LAW AND BRITISH SOFA

¶6. (C) The Ambassador congratulated the Speaker on passage of the investment law and the British SOFA. Regarding the latter, he expressed surprise that there was Iraqi opposition, even from Sadrists, about a proposal designed to protect Iraq's critical oil platforms. Samarra'i noted the heavily ideological, non-pragmatic political views of many Sadrists and also pointed to Iran's heavy influence on them. Iran deeply opposed the security agreements with both the British and the United States, as it opposed having western military forces near its borders.

THE FUTURE OF REGIONAL SECURITY

¶7. (C) More broadly, Samarra'i called for a new regional political and security architecture after the elections, as Iraq begins to assume a more normal role in the region. He acknowledged the Ambassador's point that Iran was not being a good neighbor, but noted "they have been our neighbor for 5,000 years and we have to find a way to live with them." The Speaker gently criticized some neighboring Arab states for lacking self-confidence and exaggerating the influence and

power of Iran. "They try to build walls to shut out this (exaggerated) power," and it is not an effective way to counter Iran's real, if more limited, influence. Samarra'i called for more robust economic relations among countries in the region, with people-to-people exchanges, and other non-security focused ways of projecting power. The countries need to accept the neighbors -- and their security -- and move on to more constructive forms of engagement, rather than trying to undermine that security, Samarra'i said.

HILL